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COLORADO EXPLORES USES FOR GEOTHERMAL ENERGY RESOURCES

Colorado has the nation's 4th largest geothermal resource

DENVER – Recent studies by the Colorado Geological Survey indicate that Colorado's geothermal energy resources may be much greater than previously known. The Governor's Office of Energy Management and Conservation (OEMC) and the Colorado Geological Survey (CGS) have partnered to best map the state's geothermal potential.

Colorado is ranked fourth among states in terms of the number of potential sites, which is nine, for geothermal power potential in a 2006 Western Governor's Association report. With the advancement of geothermal technologies, Colorado may now be able to produce electricity, which has previously not been considered.

Geothermal energy is an enormous, domestic, underused heat and power resource that emits little or no greenhouse gases and is a reliable resource. Geothermal resources range from shallow ground to hot water and rock several miles below the Earth's surface. It is accessed similar to drilling for oil and can be used for direct applications and power generation.

CGS has identified several areas of the state where geothermal energy may be abundant. These locations include areas near Mt. Princeton outside of Buena Vista, the San Juan mountains near Ouray and Rico, and areas of the Raton Basin west of Trinidad.

Expanding Colorado's geothermal energy resources was the topic of discussion by community, energy, private industry, utility, and government leaders at "Colorado's GeoPowering the West" conference held in Lakewood, January 31. The geothermal energy state working group was organized by the OEMC and funded by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).

"Geothermal energy presents an opportunity to expand renewable resources in Colorado that is often overlooked. This opportunity fits perfectly with Governor Ritter's promise to add a full mix of renewable energies for our state," said Tom Plant, OEMC director, while delivering the conference opening address. "Our hope is to have geothermal energy take a seat at Colorado's renewable energy table alongside solar and wind power."

The potential of geothermal energy worldwide has been estimated to be 50,000 times the world's oil and gas reserves, according to the DOE. Most of the U.S.'s geothermal resources are located in the western states. Colorado could have a significant part of that geothermal resource, but more research and data are needed to define its full potential.

Geothermal energy could be a key player in helping ease pressure on traditional fossil fuel sources. Unlike other renewables, which depend upon specific conditions to generate electricity, geothermal power plants can provide consistent base load power similar to coal power plants. Geothermal power is also virtually non-polluting, emitting very low or no greenhouse gases.



“Geothermal energy is currently used in a few Colorado locations for direct applications, such as heating swimming pools or buildings, but no electricity is being generated,” said Plant. “The Workgroup will deliver a Strategic Plan in June that identifies challenges and opportunities for geothermal power production and direct use.”

For more information:

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